UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/47/541
20 October 1992

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-seventh session
Agenda item 66

# QUESTION OF ANTARCTICA

## Report of the Secretary-General

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 46/41 A of 6 December 1991, the General Assembly reaffirmed the principle that the international community was entitled to information covering all aspects of Antarctica and that the United Nations should be made the repository for all such information in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 41/88 A, 42/46 B, 43/83 A, 44/124 B and 45/78 A; reiterated its call upon the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties to deposit information and documents covering all aspects of Antarctica with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on his evaluations thereof to the Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

2. Accordingly, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to the States Parties 1/ to the Antarctic Treaty asking them to reply in pursuance of paragraph 4 of resolution 46/41 A as soon as possible but not later than 29 May 1992.

3. On 12 May 1992, the Secretary-General received the following note from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations responding on behalf of the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty:

> "The Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to transmit enclosed two English-language copies of the final report of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, which took place at Bonn from 7 to 18 October 1991."

4. A summary of that report follows below.

## II. SUMMARY OF INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTS COVERING ALL ASPECTS OF ANTARCTICA RECEIVED FROM THE ANTARCTIC TREATY CONSULTATIVE PARTIES

5. The final report of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (available upon request within the Secretariat) contains comprehensive information about different aspects of Antarctica.

6. Accordingly, the agenda reflects, inter alia, that the following issues were taken up:

A. Operation of the Antarctic Treaty system:

- Inspections under the Antarctic Treaty;
- Environmental monitoring.

B. Human impact on the Antarctic environment:

- Waste disposal;
- Marine pollution;
- Implementation of environmental impact assessment procedures.

C. The Antarctic protected area system:

- Proposals for new sites of special scientific interest (SSSI);
- Proposals for new marine sites of special scientific interest;
- Changes to existing SSSIs and specially protected areas (SPA);
- Prop- ls for new SPAs;
- Proposals for specially reserved areas (SRA);
- Proposals for multiple-use planning areas (MPA);
- Review of the system;
- Historic sites and monuments.

D. Promotion of international scientific cooperation:

- The role of Antarctic science in understanding the global environment, including depletion of the ozone layer;
- Antarctic Science Conference, Bremen 1991.

E. International Antarctic scientific and logistic cooperation:

- Measures for scientific and logistic cooperation in Antarctica;
- Comparability and accessibility of Antarctic scientific data;
- Siting of Antarctic stations;
- Tourism and non-governmental expeditions in the Antarctic Treaty Area;
- Antarctic meteorology and telecommunications;
- Marine hydrometeorlogical services to navigation in the Southern Ocean;
- Cooperation in hydrographic surveying and charting of Antarctic waters;
- Air safety in Antarctica;
- Frequency of future Consultative Meetings and date and place of the Seventeenth Consultative Meeting;
- Commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Antarctic Treaty.

7. The Meeting also received reports from the following:

(a) The Chairman of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR);

(b) The head of the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in his capacity as representative of the Depositary Government of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals;

(c) The President of the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR);

(d) The head of the delegation of the United States of America in his capacity as representative of the Depositary Government of the Antarctic Treaty;

(e) The Chairman of the Tenth Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting;

(f) The Chairman of the Eleventh Antarctic Treaty Special Consultative Meeting;

(g) The Chairman of the Meeting relating to article 8 (7) of the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities;

(h) The Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations in his capacity as Convenor of the informal group of Treaty parties;

(i) The World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Hydrographic Organization (IHO).

8. The Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting was seized of the question of future action with regard to the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. In this connection, the absolute priority of the earliest possible ratification and entry into force of the Protocol was stressed.

9. The Meeting discussed working papers submitted by the United States and Japan, and an information paper by Uruguay on the establishment of an Antarctic Treaty secretariat. It was noted that widespread support existed for the establishment of a small, modern, cost-effective secretariat, responsible to and under the authority of the Consultative Meetings, to support the operation of the Antarctic Treaty consultative mechanism. The need for a secretariat was mainly based on support for the increasingly complex operations of the Antarctic Treaty consultative mechanism; circulation of information and facilitation of the implementation of the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. No consensus was reached on the immediate establishment of a secretariat and the Meeting postponed further consideration of the question until the next Consultative Meeting.

10. The Meeting also reviewed the problem of human impact on the Antarctic environment. There was a general discussion of waste disposal, marine pollution, implementation of environmental impact assessment procedures and protection of fauna and flora. The Meeting noted that the problem of marine dumping should be monitored, and that particular attention should be paid to it in further considerations relating to marine pollution, as required by recommendation XV-4.

11. On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty and the development of the Antarctic Treaty system, it was noted that the international cooperation in Antarctic scientific research had steadily and progressively increased. In that context, it was noted that the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty had designated Antarctica as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science.

12. The Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting adopted a series of recommendations concerning the establishment of new sites of special scientific interest, specially protected areas, areas protection and management.

13. The Meeting also recommended to the Governments of the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties that an informal meeting of the parties should be convened with a view of making proposals to the Seventeenth Consultative Meeting on the question of a comprehensive regulation of tourist and

non-governmental activities in Antarctica. This would be in accordance with the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty and its annexes. It would also take into account the proposals made at the present Sixteenth Consultative Meeting, including proposals for a future annex to the Protocol on Environmental Protection.

14. In a declaration made by the Contracting Parties on the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Antarctic Treaty, it was reaffirmed that the objective of the Antarctic Treaty was to ensure, in the interest of all mankind, that Antarctica should continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and should not become the scene or object of international discord. The annex to the Declaration underscores that nations can work together for their mutual benefit and in the interest of international peace and cooperation. It was also asserted that the Antarctic Treaty provided an example of how nations could successfully work together to preserve a major part of this planet, as a zone of peace, where the environment is protected for all and science is pre-eminent.

15. A statement by the CCAMLR observer at the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting reflected that the current levels of fishing was not high; krill was being fished in the Convention Area with a total annual catch of approximately 400,000 tons. It was also noted that most of the krill taken in the South Atlantic was from the Antarctic Peninsula region, the South Orkney Islands and South Georgia, but in spite of that fact the current level of total catch was rather small. However, there was a concern that because fishing was concentrated in a few relatively small areas, it might have a negative impact on krill predators that foraged within these areas. The Scientific Committee had noted that taking account of the current state of knowledge of krill biology and ecology and the ability to estimate its abundance and distribution, it was not then possible, nor likely to be possible in the near future, to provide any more precise estimates of the sustainable yield. Thus, at the 1990 Commission Meeting, it was proposed that precautionary measures should be adopted for krill fishing until such time as more precise information was available. In the opinion of the Commission, this would also be a safeguard for krill predators, and would therefore allow krill fishing to develop in a controlled manner.

16. Although no drift-net fishing had been started in the area, the Commission discussed the prospects and agreed that there would be no expansion of large-scale pelagic drift-net fishing into the high seas of the Convention Area. As regards the management of the developing fisheries, the statement of the CCAMLR observer indicated that such development had to be directly linked with the process of elaborating scientific methods and management procedures.

17. The Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) was supported by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties from the time of the first Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 1961. Since that time SCAR has provided scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty system. SCAR collaborated in the development of the Agreed Measures for the Conservation of Antarctic Fauna and Flora of 1964. SCAR played a special role in the Convention for Conservation

of Antarctic Seals of 1972. It also responded to requests for advice on possible environmental impacts of mineral exploration in reports published in 1979 and 1985. A 15-year international programme, BIOMASS, was formulated in 1976 by SCAR. SCAR's report noted that in the 1980s the activities of environmental pressure groups had led to potential conflicts between environmental protection and scientific activities. The report noted that the media had belittled or ignored SCAR's efforts in environmental protection. SCAR was concerned about the possible diminution of its role in relation to the Antarctic Treaty system and the effect that might have on freedom of scientific investigation and cooperation.

18. The report of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting also noted that the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes (COMNAP) was established at Hobart in 1988. COMNAP met yearly at the same time and in the same location as the delegates' meeting of SCAR. Among the objectives of the Council were to review on a regular basis operational matters and exchange information; to examine, discuss and seek possible solutions to common operational problems; to review, with appropriate SCAR working groups and groups of specialists projected programmes requiring major international collaboration on operations logistics and to provide appropriate advice to the SCAR Executive; and to respond to requests by the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting and SCAR for information advice and comment.

19. In his report to the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, the COMNAP representative noted, inter alia, that, in addition to scientific issues, which had been ably handled by SCAR, the Treaty was faced with a growing number of operational issues: environmental protection, commercial uses of the Antarctic (tourism) and an expanding number of national programmes that were required to put the Treaty agreements into practice. It was also noted that there was an increasing need to coordinate and make effective logistic support for the expanding scientific programmes being planned for the next decade noted in the report of COMNAP. Moreover, several international programmes that contain significant Antarctic components were being advanced through a non-governmental organization, the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU): the World Climate Research Programme, the Joint Global Ocean Flux Study and the International Geosphere - Biosphere Programme. Other programmes initiated by SCAR include the Antarctic lithosphere studies, Ecology of the Antarctic Sea Ice Zone, Biology of Terrestrial Antarctic Systems and so on. COMNAP and the Standing Committee on Antarctic Logistics and Operations have established a regular dialogue in which the logistic needs of the Antarctic science community were shared and reviewed, as noted in the report of COMNAP.

20. In 1989, COMNAP created a subgroup to prepare a workshop with the aim of establishing practical guidelines for the environmental assessment process in Antarctica. The workshop was held in Italy in 1991 and attended by national programme managers of 21 countries with more than 50 environmental, legal, scientific and logistics experts. The workshop prepared a final text of the guidelines and two recommendations to COMNAP. The first recommended practical guidelines that should be used in the initiation and subsequent preparation of

Antarctic environmental assessments by national Antarctic programmes. The second recommended that a regular forum for the discussion and development of Antarctic environmental matters be established within COMNAP.

21. The stated goals of the practical guidelines were to provide managers of national Antarctic programmes with an explicit and concise standard for the implementation and review of environmental assessment procedures. An additional purpose of these guidelines was to assure that the development of such mechanisms and associated procedures were fully coordinated among the national Antarctic programmes so as to be comparable, effective and justifiable. It was also hoped that these guidelines could serve as an aid to non-governmental organizations proposing activities in Antarctica. The guidelines have been forwarded by COMNAP to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting for possible adoption, as expressed in its recommendation XV-1 adopted at the Paris Consultative Meeting.

22. Following the report of COMNAP in 1989, and in response to Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting recommendation XIII-4, a SCAR panel of experts, with the involvement of national operating agencies, produced a definitive report on waste disposal including a proposed comprehensive code of conduct. As a result, recommendation XV-3, concerning the human impact on the Antarctic environment ("Waste disposal"), was adopted. Format and procedure for the waste management report were further discussed and adjusted during the third meeting of the Standing Committee on Antarctic Logistics and Operations, held at Bologna from 20 to 22 June 1991.

23. A subgroup on oil spill prevention and response was established by the Standing Committee in 1990. The subgroup developed a series of recommendations on oil spill prevention and response, which were considered and adopted at the 1991 COMNAP/the Standing Committee meetings at Bologna.

24. COMNAP undertook a project to design a concise "Visitors' Guide to the Antarctic". The guide has been adopted and has been translated into several languages. It is designed to be placed in every cabin of every tourist ship bound for Antarctica and at every Antarctic scientific station.

25. In the three years since its establishment, COMNAP, as noted in the final report of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, has developed as a useful forum for direct and effective communications among the national operators. The Council has undertaken the kinds of collective strategic study and planning necessary for the provision of sound advice for the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting. As a result it has rapidly become an essential element in the Antarctic Treaty system.

26. The report of the Sixteenth Meeting also indicated that the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC), comprising more than 200 member organizations in 45 countries, participated in the Meeting. Its report noted, inter alia, that the Treaty parties' commitment to "the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment and its dependent and associated ecosystems" is the beginning of a new period in the evolution of the Antarctic Treaty. ASOC has

endorsed the designation of Antarctica as a "natural reserve, devoted to peace and science" and looks forward to working closely with the Treaty Governments and other observers to implement it.

## III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

27. Information outlined in documents available, particularly those provided by Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, have addressed several aspects of Antarctica. The final report of the Sixteenth Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting details scientific research and initiatives pursued and developed over the last 30 years. In that regard, it should be noted that international cooperation has been achieved at the level of Governments, some United Nations specialized agencies and programmes, and relevant international and non-governmental organizations.

28. Documents submitted, such as those summarized above, appear to reflect that the existing Antarctic Treaty system continues (a) to foster international cooperation; (b) to adapt to changing environmental priorities; and (c) to elaborate new mechanisms in line with innovative scientific research. They also indicate interest in renewed global efforts in line with increased public awareness, particularly as regards Antarctic ecosystems, and growing world-wide environmental concerns.

## Notes

1/ The States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty are the following (underlining indicates consultative status): Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Poland, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay.

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